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ABSTRACT

Parent involvement in children's education is important for children's school success; however, not all children have parents who are involved in their schools. This issue brief examines factors that are associated with fathers' and mothers' involvement in their children's schools among children in kindergarten through 12th grade living in two-parent and single-parent families. Findings are drawn from data from the National Household Education Survey (NHES) for 1996. Findings noted include the following: (1) children in elementary school are more likely than children in middle or high school to have parents who are highly involved in their schools; (2) children with more family resources, as measured by parents' education and household income, are more likely than children with fewer resources to have parents who are highly involved in their schools; and (3) children whose mothers and fathers are highly involved in their schools are more likely to have greater levels of "social capital" as measured by activities shared with parents and high parental educational expectations. The issue brief concludes by noting that by the time children reach high school a much smaller proportion than in grade school have parents who remain highly involved in their schools. Although part of the decrease is attributable to schools offering parents fewer opportunities for involvement, parents too are stepping back as their children grow older. Research suggests, however, that adolescents benefit when their parents are involved. (HTH)

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ISSUE BRIEF

April 1998

Factors Associated With Fathers' and Mothers' Involvement in Their Children's Schools

Parent involvement in children's education is important for children's school success (U.S. Department of Education, 1994; Henderson and Berla, 1994). Not all children, however, have parents who are involved in their schools. This issue brief examines factors that are associated with fathers' and mothers' involvement in their children's schools among children in kindergarten through 12th grade living in two-parent and in single-parent families. The data for this analysis come from the 1996 National Household Education Survey (NHES:96), sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

The NHES:96 asked about four types of school activities that parents could participate in during the school year: attending a general school meeting, attending a regularly scheduled parent–teacher conference, attending a school or class event, and serving as a volunteer at the school. Parents who participated in none or only one activity are said to have low involvement. Parents who participated in two activities are described as having moderate involvement. Parents who participated in three or four activities are said to be highly involved in their children's schools.[1]

Children in elementary school are more likely than children in middle or high school to have parents who are highly involved in their schools.

Mothers and fathers in two-parent and in single-parent families tend to decrease their involvement in their children's schools as their children move from elementary to middle to high school (table 1). Among children in kindergarten through 5th grade, 69 percent of children living in two-parent families and 60 percent living in mother-only families have mothers who are highly involved in their schools. Among children in grades 9 through 12, however, only 39 percent of children living in two-parent families and 32 percent living in mother-only families have mothers who are highly involved in their schools. Similarly, the proportion of children living in two-parent families with fathers who are highly involved in their schools decreases from 30 percent in elementary school to 23 percent in high school. Part of the decrease in parental involvement is due to schools offering parents fewer opportunities for involvement as children grow older (U.S. Department of Education, 1997).

Table 1.—Percent of children whose parents are involved in their schools, by level of involvement[1] and selected child and family characteristics: Students in grades K–12, 1996

	Two-parent families				Single-parent families			
	Mother		Father		Mother		Father	
	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High
Child's grade level								
Kindergarten - 5th grade	12	69	43	30	16	60	21	53
6th - 8th grade	22	51	50	25	28	45	29	53
9th - 12th grade	36	39	54	23	43	32	40	27
Parent's education[2]								
Less than high school	43	31	72	10	40	32	35	41
High school or equivalent	24	51	55	21	28	46	34	36
VoTech or some college	18	59	45	28	21	56	25	51
Bachelor's degree	12	69	35	37	13	64	22	54
Graduate/professional school	10	70	31	41	18	62	19	67
Household income								
Less than $25,000	32	42	66	15	29	45	31	43
$25,000 - 34,999	24	52	56	21	22	53	30	38
$35,000 - 49,000	19	59	44	29	19	58	32	45
$50,000 - 74,999	16	61	38	32	16	64	19	57
$75,000 or more	13	68	35	37	19	57	18	64

[1] Low involvement is participation in none or only one activity. High involvement is participation in three or four activities. Percents are computed across rows but do not sum to 100 because the percent with moderate involvement is not shown.
[2] Education of mother for mother's involvement and education of father for father's involvement.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1996 National Household Education Survey.

[1] Not all schools offer parents the opportunity to be involved in each of these activities. Low involvement can result because parents do not take advantage of available opportunities for involvement or because schools do not offer them opportunities for involvement.

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Children with more family resources as measured by parents' education and household income are more likely than children with fewer resources to have parents who are highly involved in their schools.

Regardless of whether children live in two-parent or in single-parent families, the proportion of children whose mothers or fathers are highly involved in their schools increases as their parents' education level increases. Among children living in two-parent families, 31 percent have mothers who are highly involved in their schools if their mothers have less than a high school education, while 70 percent have highly involved mothers if their mothers have graduate or professional school experience. Similarly, 10 percent of children in two-parent families whose fathers have less than a high school education have highly involved fathers, while 41 percent whose fathers have graduate or professional school experience have highly involved fathers.

Children are also more likely to have mothers' and fathers' who are highly involved in their schools as household income increases. Sixty-eight percent of children living in two-parent families with household incomes over $75,000 have highly involved mothers compared to 42 percent in households earning less than $25,000 (table 1).

Children whose mothers and fathers are highly involved in their schools are more likely to have greater levels of "social capital" as measured by activities shared with parents and high parental educational expectations.

It is not only measures of socioeconomic status that are linked to mothers' and fathers' involvement in school. Children whose mothers and fathers are highly involved in their schools are more apt to have families that share activities with them such as reading stories or visiting the library with them or who expect that they will graduate from a 4-year college (table 2).

Discussion

Most children in elementary school have parents who are involved in their schools, but by the time children reach high school a much smaller proportion have parents who remain highly involved in their schools. Although part of the decrease is attributable to schools offering parents fewer opportunities for involvement, parents too are stepping back as their children grow older. Research suggests, however, that adolescents benefit when their parents are involved (U.S. Department of Education, 1997).

Children who are advantaged in terms of parental education and household income are more likely than other children to have parents who are highly involved in their schools. Furthermore, children who have highly involved parents are also generally more likely to share activities with them and to have parents who have high educational aspirations for them.

References and Related Publications

Henderson, A.T., and Berla, N. (1994). *A New Generation of Evidence: The Family is Critical to Student Achievement*. Washington, DC: National Committee for Citizens in Action.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (1997). *Fathers' Involvement in Their Children's Schools*. NCES 98-091, by Christine Winquist Nord, DeeAnn Brimhall, and Jerry West. Washington, DC.

U.S. Department of Education. (1994). *Strong Families, Strong Schools: Building Community Partnerships for Learning*. Washington, DC.

Table 2.—Percent of children with selected sources of social capital, by level of parental involvement[1] in their schools and family type: Students in grades K–12, 1996

	Two-parent families				Single-parent families			
	Mother		Father		Mother		Father	
	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High
In the past week, someone in the family[2]....								
told child a story	55	72	64	74	58	72	71	71
worked on a project with child	53	70	60	72	47	65	66	64
In the past month, someone visited[2]....								
the library with child	32	59	44	62	26	52	32	47
a museum or historical site with child	11	25	15	29	13	24	9	26
Parent expects youth will graduate from a 4-year college[3]	75	91	79	92	72	87	56	90

[1] Low involvement is participation in none or only one activity. High involvement is participation in three or four activities.
[2] Children in Kindergarten - 5th grade.
[3] Students in 6th - 12th grade.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1996 National Household Education Survey.

Issue Briefs present information on education topics of current interest. All estimates shown are based on samples and are subject to sampling variability. All differences discussed are statistically significant at the .05 level. In the design, conduct, and data processing of NCES surveys, efforts are made to minimize the effects of nonsampling errors, such as item nonresponse, measurement error, data processing error, or other systematic error. For additional details on NHES:96 data collection methods and definitions, see U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (1997). *National Household Education Survey of 1996: Data File User's Manual*, Vol. 1, NCES 97-425, by Mary A. Collins et al. Washington, DC.

This **Issue Brief** was prepared by Christine Winquist Nord of Westat. To obtain standard errors or definitions of terms for this **Issue Brief**, or to obtain additional information about the National Household Education Survey, contact Jerry West (202) 219-1574. To order additional copies of this **Issue Brief** or other NCES publications, call 1-800-424-1616. NCES publications are available on the Internet at http://NCES.ed.gov.